EMMANUEL REY (Ed.)



At a time of climate emergency, shrinking available resources, and environmental crisis, awareness of the multiple consequences of decades of urban sprawl is leading to the promotion of territorial strategies aimed at preserving natural environments and arable land by prioritizing the inward shift of urbanization. This effort extends well beyond city centers to include vast and varied territories in suburban and peri-urban regions. The creation – or reinforcement – of neighborhoods with a density carefully adapted to the context, a fine mix of functions, and a low-carbon interconnection to the wider territory is a promising strategy to which the architectural project can make a decisive contribution.

These observations are at the heart of the work carried out by the Laboratory of Architecture and Sustainable Technologies (LAST), which systematically integrates a multidimensional perspective, a multi-scalar imbrication, an evaluative approach, and an openness to interdisciplinarity into its approach. Between the freedom offered by the academic framework and investigations rooted in concrete sites, the many works gathered here provide an architectural corpus that reveals the rich field of possibilities in the face of the complex nature of contemporary issues. Through multi-scalar approaches and interdisciplinary contributions, this collective effort becomes the source of broader questions related to the evolving role of the architect in the multiple territories in transition.

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EMMANUEL REY (Ed.)











Pascal Gontier Architect, Atelier Pascal Gontier, Paris Expert for studio reviews, 2011-12











Renato Salvi Architect, Sion Expert for studio reviews, 2011-19







"When teaching architectural design, it is important to develop an awareness of the craftsmanship of the profession alongside the essential intellectual knowledge. In this sense, Prof. Emmanuel Rey's studio stands apart from imposing projects and passing fads. Housing is one of the recurring themes, still so difficult to tackle to date. It's a primary necessity for all of us, both as individuals and with our neighbors, to shape the city. A difficult exercise in identifying and projecting into the future. A measured, necessary, and enriching lesson. Each time, I left with refreshed energy, renewed confidence to commit myself again and again, and the feeling that the students, too, were ready to take up the work forward, confident."

Renato Salvi Architect, Sion Expert for studio reviews, 2011-19







"Is there a better teaching tool for architectural coherence than collective housing? The issues at stake are many: social, environmental, landscape, urban planning, architectural, typological, constructive, and economic. Balancing them is the fruit of an iterative process that is as enjoyable as it is tedious. From neighborhood planning to different material assembly, domestic architecture plays with scales of perception and representation tools in an incessant handover that can appear sophisticated. Teaching housing means, on the one hand, taking on the responsibility to speak not only of our private lives but also how we live together; and above all, it means acquiring the conviction that housing is a common good of inestimable value."

Yves Dreier Architect, Dreier Frenzel, Lausanne Guest lecturer, 2010-2014







Christian Gilot Professor UCL, Louvain-la-Neuve Guest lecturer, 2016-17











"The originality of Prof. Emmanuel Rey's studio lies in its integration of the precepts of sustainable architecture from the very inception of the project, and thematizing these criteria so that they become sources for the project's creation and composition. This approach makes perfect sense given the complexity of the issues facing us regarding urban planning, architecture, the environment, the economy, and society. This teaching allows students to develop their synthesis skills by apprehending the project in its entirety and practicing it by moving back and forth between the urban and constructive scales. This method highlights all components of a project and reveals the skills needed to maintain its coherence, from fundamentals to details."

Antonio Gallina Architect, frundgallina, Neuchâtel Expert for studio reviews, 2010-15

EMMANUEL REY TRANSFORMATIONS

"Fundamentally, architecture is an art of transforming situations, but it is also an art of turning norms into forms, references into inventions, and nature into culture."

Paul Chemetov [1]

Since the first industrial revolution [2] and the spectacular rise of fossil fuels worldwide, human activities have developed at an unprecedented pace, profoundly altering the territories in which they have unfolded. The environmental impacts of this socio-economic development are so far-reaching that a growing number of intellectuals consider that we have entered a new geological era – the Anthropocene – in which humans have acquired such influence over the biosphere that they have become its central actors [3].

The consequences are evident not only in global imbalances but also in the multiplication of problems arising in more localized contexts, as well as in the growing risk of an uncontrolled depletion of available resources. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, growing awareness of these issues is giving rise to profound reconsiderations, accompanied by deep uncertainty about our collective ability to invent new societal balances – ones capable of managing resources sparingly, drastically limiting ecological damage, and repairing the consequences of past excesses, while simultaneously adapting to a climate disruption whose full scale remains only partially understood [4].

^[1] Cité dans Rubin P. ET AL., *Transformation des situations construites*. Paris : Canal Architecture, 2020, pp. 102-103.

^[2] Economists and historians agree that the first industrial revolution took place at the end of the $18^{\rm th}$ century in the UK, precisely between 1780 and 1810, coinciding with the start of mass coal mining and the exploitation of the steam engine.

^[3] CRUTZEN P. J., STOERMER E. F., «The Anthropocene». *Global Change*, 2000, no 41, pp. 17-18.

^[4] Bihouix Ph., Le bonheur était pour demain. Paris : Le Seuil, 2019.

Architecture is no exception to these fundamental questions, resulting in a growing quest for the most appropriate ways to renew itself without losing its vocation or its soul. Fifty years after the publication of the famous report "The Limits to Growth" commissioned by the Club of Rome [5], the discipline finds itself confronted with the same issues and perplexities as society at large. Aware of their social responsibilities but realistic about the pitfalls of dogmatic postures, architects today can neither rely on the continuation of obsolete practices nor fall for the illusion of a simple and glorious return to pre-modernity. Between contemporary realities and inescapable challenges linked to the consequences of climate disruption, we believe it is essential to identify how these new paradigms are likely to nourish the architectural discipline. It is in this spirit that the deliberately plural expression "transformations" should be understood here:

- The first transformation component is driven by the ambition to reshape the built environment towards sustainability. Already underway, this vast project involves a genuine dynamic of transition, from the qualitative regeneration of already built-up areas to the ecological management of available resources, the decarbonization of urban systems, the circularity of economic processes, and the anticipation of socio-cultural changes. From this perspective, and given the urgency of climate change, contributing to the accelerated implementation of a decarbonized society stands out as both a crucial priority and an unavoidable challenge [6].
- The second component of transformation is linked to the nature of the sites on which most architectural projects are now focused. In the post-industrial era that currently characterizes the whole European continent, priority is to revisit already urbanized areas that nonetheless offer significant potential for qualitative evolution. Due to their distinctive features and strategic location, such sites call for in-depth inquiry into the confrontation with the existing, the determination of the appropriate degree of renewal, and ultimately, the inscription of a new stratum into the territorial palimpsest [7].
- The third transformation component concerns aspects of the architectural discipline itself. As an art of transformation, architecture cannot remain disconnected from the challenges of our time. Within the context of ecological transition, the architectural project stands in a dialectical relationship. On the one hand, it can make a significant contribution as a driving force behind proposals to the ongoing changes, particularly those aimed at meeting society's primary needs with few resources and minimal impact. On the other hand, from a conceptual point of view, these challenges simultaneously constitute a "raw material" for rethinking some of the intrinsic modalities of the architectural project [8].

These observations have been at the heart of our thinking since the founding of the Laboratory of Architecture and Sustainable Technologies (LAST) at the Ecole polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) in 2010. They have prompted us to renew our approach to project teaching and to develop an architectural research activity, systematically integrating a multidimensional perspective, a multi-scalar interweaving, an evaluative approach, and an openness to interdisciplinarity [9] [10].

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Understanding territories in transition

Marked by decades of urban sprawl, the setting for the various works gathered in this collection is defined by relatively diffuse boundaries between city and countryside. As in most neighboring countries, statistical data confirm the empirical observations of contemporary Swiss landscapes. Whereas only 45% of Switzerland's resident population lived in cities and conurbations in 1950, today these areas are home to around 77% of the country's population and 79% of its jobs [11]. These spatial structures are simultaneously contiguous, juxtaposed, and heterogeneous, with blurred boundaries, and now constitute the dominant form of settlement for inhabitants and their activities. This situation raises profound questions, notably concerning the risk of a certain uniformization of low-density territories and the multiple impacts induced by urban sprawl: landscape fragmentation, increased car dependency, high infrastructure costs, abundant consumption of non-renewable resources, and excessive greenhouse gas emissions [12].

These observations have led us to question the logic at work in previous decades and to promote qualitative density within already urbanized areas. Without a more parsimonious and reasoned use of land, it seems impossible to truly influence the trends previously observed. This dynamic, which prompts reflection on reclaiming under-valued spaces at the heart of the built environment, extends well beyond city centers to include vast territories in suburban and peri-urban regions. Some sectors represent strategic opportunities to contribute to the transition of urban areas, notably those located close to public transport stops and offering simultaneously potential for new residents and activities. This approach makes it possible to curb urban sprawl and encourage a shift away from dependence on individual motorized transport [13]. It also represents an increased challenge for architectural projects, which must reconcile a given density with a genuine quality of life.

Careful attention to public and green spaces, the development of new amenities, the integration of sharred spaces, and the decentralization of services close to homes all encourage socio-cultural support for this territorial reorientation. This must also be considered within the context of a changing demographic structure, strongly influenced by the emergence of a long-life society and the breakdown of the traditional family model. According to recent forecasts for 2050, only 29% of Swiss households will comprise more than two people. Most households will then consist of either a single person (28%) or two people (33%) [14]. Yet a recent survey by the Swiss Federal Office of Culture shows that a single-family house in a green setting is still the "dream home" for a majority of respondents, for whom it is synonymous with a high quality of life [15]. Even if these residential aspirations are likely to evolve, addressing the need for new forms of proximity and developing intergenerational housing models better suited to an aging population remain considerable challenges [16].

In this respect, the creation – or reinforcement – of neighborhoods with a density carefully adapted to the context, a fine mix of functions, and a low-carbon interconnection to the wider territory is a promising strategy. From city centers to urban peripheries, the Swiss Plateau offers a particularly fertile field for exploring the diverse potential of this type of site. This is why the four books in this collection respectively address returning to the city [17], regenerating urban brownfields [18], creating new suburban polarities [19], and transforming peri-urban neighborhoods [20]. Resulting from both bottom-up and top-down reflections, these multiple works illustrate the interest of a polycentric, reticular, and symbiotic approach

to anchoring the transformation of the Swiss Plateau in recognition of its singularity, but also in a project dynamic that increasingly integrates issues of synergies, proximities, and circularities. Moving beyond the traditional divide between city and countryside, this integrative territorial vision, which we have named Helvepolis, can provide a framework for more sustainable lifestyles, reconciling quality of life across various urban territories with the preservation of arable land and areas of high ecological value [21].

Cultivating a multi-scalar approach

The issues raised by this inward shift in urbanization are not merely quantitative, and the architectural project is set to assume a central role in the search for alternatives to further urban sprawl [22]. For this reason, our studio's didactic approach is deliberately situated across different scales of intervention – from the urban project to the construction detail. In this way, the architectural process is brought into dialogue with broader issues.

The learning phases are based on the search for proposals to create a neighborhood of a specific density, suitable for housing and activities, within a surrounding context that is already urbanized. Positioned at the interface between architecture and urban planning, the neighborhood scale enables us to grasp the reality of the urban territories concerned in a dimension vast enough to touch on issues that go beyond the scope of a single building, yet circumscribed enough to visualize the potential of the proposed solutions [23].

Throughout the academic year, the project process is designed to be iterative, marked by continuous interplay between the different scales under consideration. In terms of didactic organization, it is structured around specific milestones corresponding to the urban form, the built entity, the building, the housing, and the envelope. In the first part of the academic year, which focuses on questions of contextual analysis, morphology, and urban structure, work is developed in groups. In the second part of the year, work becomes individualized to deepen the understanding of representative parts of the proposed vision for the future neighborhood, while maintaining ongoing collaboration and refinement within the group.

At the neighborhood scale, the approach aims to capture pre-existing traces on the site, to identify lines of force, and to propose a guiding idea to formalize both built and landscaped elements. In particular, this involves exploring the interactions between issues of density, functional mix, proximity, and mobility. At the building scale, the focus shifts to the design of one or more mixed-use buildings, highlighting especially the residential component and the precise relationship between the building and public space. This phase begins with a 1/33 scale study of an apartment that exemplifies the housing concept imagined to take advantage of the site's assets (orientation, clearance, views, outdoor space) and the proposed morphology. Exploring the project mechanisms that allow a transition from a perceived space to built space, the definition of the building envelope aims to address questions of expression and materiality by integrating certain principles of bioclimatic architecture and developing construction details in line with high environmental quality. This phase of the architectural project resonates with the need for "low-carbon" approaches for all new constructions, in parallel with the intensification of architectural interventions in existing buildings.

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Over the year, the studio's didactic activities create a synergy between interdisciplinary theoretical contributions and concrete experimentation integrating these into the architectural project. This dual approach enables students to learn about conceptual, spatial, and expressive coherence issues, remaining mindful of the challenges associated with the transition towards sustainability. The objective is to develop design skills while simultaneously acquiring an understanding of related fields to dialogue with professionals from other disciplines in a more informed way, transcending the limits of sectoral logic and, more broadly, proactively anticipating the complex challenges that lie ahead.

Developing project-based research

The project-based visions developed in the studio lie outside current regulatory frameworks or pre-established guidelines but remain of cross-disciplinary interest. Integrating new buildings into sites composed of heterogeneous landscape entities – situated between city, suburb, and countryside – opens a tangible field of exploration for the architectural project. On the ground, implementing such projects are likely to encounter numerous legal, property, and socio-economic contingencies. Deliberately freeing themselves from these constraints and taking advantage of the freedom offered by the academic framework, the project-based visions go beyond these operational considerations and do not rule out a utopian dimension. They thus assume the principle of exploration – from territorial considerations to construction details – through the parallel conception of conceivable strategies for sites selected due to their representativeness of contemporary issues. In this way, the studio's approach "does not lead to abstract solutions detached from the context but rather highlights the different facets of the site's qualities" [24].

Widely cultivated within the studio, this spirit of exploration is also reflected in the research projects conducted in parallel within the laboratory, notably as part of the various doctoral theses. These research projects seek to transcribe the issues inherent in transitions towards sustainability at different scales of architectural intervention and aim to integrate evaluative approaches into the project process. In this way, they foster the emergence of new knowledge and reveal the innovation potential that can be transposed to architectural production. It is based on three research topics, focusing on the scale of neighborhoods in transition, bioclimatic buildings, and innovative components [25]. Considering the project as a genuine knowledge tool, the three topics combine different methodological and epistemological approaches depending on the specificity of the research questions [26]:

- Research-on-design investigations focus on the study of current practices to identify their limits in terms of sustainability and projects recognized as best practices. Retrospective in essence, they generally rely on the case study principle, which structures the application of a critical thinking to the object of study through methodologies combining qualitative and quantitative analysis.
- Research-by-design investigations follow a project-based approach, in the strict sense of the term, using operating methods specific to the architectural discipline. Prospective in nature, they aim to develop parallel scenarios that feed into unprecedented comparative analyses [27], or variants obtained through successive iterations as part of an integrated design process [28].

• Research-for-design investigations focus on the development of new methodologies for architectural practice. Using hybrid methodologies, the aim is not only to create new tools but also to evaluate their operational relevance through pilot applications and interaction with field actors [29].

This combination of methodologies highlights the absence of a universal formula for moving the built environment towards greater sustainability. Instead, this evolution relies on the realization of tailor-made proposals, developed iteratively and adapted – both in terms of project and process – to the specificities of each agglomeration, each city, each site [30]. From this perspective, the architectural project can play an essential role, given its ability to integrate diverse sectoral logic. On the one hand, it provides a precise yet flexible guideline that guarantees the spatial coherence of the strategies adopted; on the other, it is the preferred means of reconciling the simultaneous search for emotion and results when transforming urban territories.

To this end, an important number of parameters must be integrated into the operating methods and decision-making processes of architectural practice. From the perspective of transitions towards sustainability, the simultaneous consideration of environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects cannot be reduced to superficial, implicit, or isolated gestures. Research shows that it must embody a genuinely reflexive and continuous approach. This is why the development of evaluative frameworks – conceived to support decision-making – is a recurrent theme in our research work. Developed through collaborations with experts from other disciplines, these evaluative approaches help to better apprehend the complexity inherent in contemporary issues, particularly at the environmental or sociological level [31].

Called NEBIUS, an acronym for Neighborhood-scale Evaluation to Benchmark the Integration of Urban Sustainability, the methodology applied to the project-based visions presented in the four books of this box set illustrates the value of this type of multi-criteria approach. It is specifically structured to enable comparative analysis using ten indicators (quantitative and qualitative). For each indicator, a histogram provides an immediate visual comparison between visions. A synoptic diagram then gathers the ten thematic indicators, whose radar-like shape offers a "sustainability profile" for each project-based vision. Thanks to the transparency of its analysis processes and the clarity of its modes of representation, the approach provides planners and decision-makers with a new decision-making tool tested at four different sites [32].

Acknowledging the complexity of implementing transitions towards sustainability, we agree with François Ascher's assertion that "sustainable development cannot serve as Tables of the Law and enunciate commandments that would all be on the same level" but rather constitutes an issue "that identifies and reminds decision-makers of the main types of challenges, all of which must be taken into account in analyses and decisions" [33]. From this point of view, while evaluative approaches are likely to enrich the project process, they by no means allow trade-offs to be avoided. At a time of climate urgency, however, they can help to ensure that the latter are more relevant and, above all, more explicit.

In contrast to previous centuries, one of our challenges is to ensure that the transition does not take the form of a tabula rasa or the utopia of creating a new "ideal city" in the middle of the countryside. In

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the context of European urbanized areas, whose multi-secular nature corresponds to what we now call a tabula scripta [34], the transition is conceived through the search for a series of convergent actions, coherently interwoven from territory to detail, based first and foremost on pre-existing potentialities within the already-built environment, which need to be identified, revealed, enriched or enhanced [35]. Since most of the urban territories of the future already exist, it seems more relevant than ever to simultaneously assume their diverse heritage and undertake the transformations necessary to make them both habitable and desirable in the long term.



























Pierre Bonnet Architect, Atelier Bonnet, Geneva Expert for studio reviews, , 2015-2022







"The methodology taught in Prof. Emmanuel Rey's studio, from a global vision at the scale of the city down to constructive detail, enables us to generate coherent projects that include overarching issues such as mobility and the integration of vegetation, right from the first sketches. The sensitivity to sustainable development that Prof. Emmanuel Rey was able to convey throughout the year, a field which at the time was much less present than it is today, guided me in my study and professional choices."

Jessica Ruffieux Student at the studio, 2011-2012



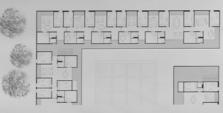


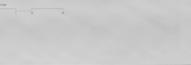




















"After the challenging intensity of the first year of architecture, lapproached the design project in Prof. Emmanuel Rey's studio the following year with unexpected serenity. The professor, along with his assistants and guest experts, accompanied us with passion and kindness throughout the year. They distilled targeted advice to encourage us to keep refining our projects in an atmosphere of shared trust and fruitful sincerity. In addition to stimulating reflection on a high-stakes theme, this reassuring pedagogical framework enabled me to deploy my energy in creating a project true to my values."

Juliette Armanet Student at the studio, 2016-2017







"Developing a project at different scales, from the urban form to the construction detail, was the highlight of my experience in Prof. Emmanuel Rey's studio. This approach enabled me to reflect on the relationship between architecture and sustainability in the context of urban densification, a theme which is at the heart of current debates. At the same time, depending on the project's progress, work was carried out either as part of a team or individually, highlighting the range of collaborative dynamics in our profession. In my professional career, I have been able to put the richness of this teaching into practice in the study phases of projects or competitions in which I have taken part."

Cristina Ferreira Student at the studio, 2011-2012







"During my studies in Prof. Emmanuel Rey's studio, I particularly appreciated the professor's presence and responsiveness, as well as the commitment of the assistants. Whenever we had any doubts or were curious, they were always available to share their knowledge and expertise with us. Throughout the semester, the professor presented innovative projects and invited stimulating speakers, enriching our theoretical and practical background with a focus on sustainability. During that year, I learned to design a project with attention to the various scales of the architectural project, considering multiple questions ranging from urban form to construction detail."

Alice Sikiaridis Student at the studio, 2017-2018









REFERENCES

This booklet complements the boxed collection of four books entitled GREEN DENSITY, URBAN RECOVERY, SUBURBAN POLARITY, and LIVING PERIPHERY. This publication would not have been possible without the invaluable collaboration of the many people involved in the multiple works gathered here. Special thanks go to the contributors of the four books, the students who took part in the eight studios presented here, and the studio assistants, collaborators, experts, and lecturers. A detailed list of participants is given at the end of each book.

Favet

Pages 4-7 Ubiquitous exhibition of architecture studios EPFL, June 2016

Page 8
URBAN MIX Studio (2011-2012)
Fall semester review,
EPFL, December 2011
Experts: Pascal Gontier, Renato Salvi

Pages 10-13

URBAN MIX Studio (2011-2012)

Spring semester review,

EPFL, June 2012

Experts: Pascal Gontier, Renato Salvi

Pages 14-21 URBAN LAKESIDE Studio (2012-2013) Spring semester review, EPFL, June 2013 Experts: Markus Baertschi, Nicolas

Favet, Renato Salvi

Pages 22-26 URBAN LAKESIDE Studio (2012-2013) Fall semester review, EPFL, December 2012 Experts: Markus Baertschi, Nicolas Favet, Renato Salvi

Pages 28-32 SUBURBAN LANDSCAPE Studio (2014-2015) Fall semester review, EPFL, December 2014 Experts: Antonio Gallina, Nicolas Favet

Pages 42-45 URBAN REGENERATION Studio (2013-2014) Spring semester review, EPFL, June 2014 Experts: Antonio Gallina, Nicolas Favet Page 46 LIVING PERIPHERY Studio (2017-2018) Fall semester review, EPFL, December 2017 Experts: Pierre Bonnet, Nicolas

Pages 48-50 LIVING LANDSCAPE Studio (2016-2017) Spring semester review, EPFL, June 2017 Experts: Pierre Bonnet, Nicolas Favet

Pages 52-56 LIVING LANDSCAPE Studio (2016-2017) Fall semester review, EPFL, December 2016 Experts: Pierre Bonnet, Nicolas Favet Pages 58-60 Ubiquitous exhibition of architecture studios EPFL, June 2017

Pages 62-67 GREEN DENSITY Exhibition F'AR, Forum d'architectures de Lausanne, March 2013

Pages 68-72 Ubiquitous exhibition of architecture studios EPFL, June 2018

Pages 74-77
Isle of Models Exhibition
EPFL, Archizoom, September –
December 2018